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Department of Printing

2006
Legislative
Report

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25th Legislative District



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Committees:
Joint Committee on Veterans
 & Military Affairs, *Co-Chair*
Health Care, *Vice-chair*
Economic Development, Agriculture & Trade
Capital Budget
Rules

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Washington is doing well, and for the first time in years our state finances are in good shape. But when I listen to parents, teachers, seniors, military families and others in our local communities, it quickly becomes clear that people want and need further improvements in education, the economy, health care and other problems they're facing.

We only have 60 days this year to make a positive difference on the issues people talk to me about. But if we stay focused on what really matters to citizens and put partisan politics aside, I believe we will accomplish a great deal in 60 days.

I'm writing to tell you about some of the priorities I'm working on as your representative, and to invite you to share your priorities with me. Listening is the most important part of my job, and I'd enjoy hearing the issues you'd like me to support. You can quickly reach me through any of the phone numbers and addresses on this page.

Thank you for the pleasure and honor of being your representative. Let's keep in touch!

Sincerely,

Dawn Morrell

2006 Legislative Report
HEALTH CARE FOR WASHINGTON

As a critical care nurse and Vice-chair of the Health Care Committee, I hear a lot about how rising health care costs are hurting people and businesses. There are things lawmakers can do, and should do, in 2006, to help.



Fair Prices for the Uninsured

Did you know the uninsured pay higher medical bills than the insured — for exactly the same services? That just isn't fair, and is one reason why some hospital bills never get paid. I'm championing a law to make sure pricing for medical services is fair.



Fair Insurance Rates

Because people who buy insurance as individuals have no leverage to bargain with insurers, Washington's elected Insurance Commissioner has asked for the power to reject unreasonable health insurance rate increases in the individual market. I fully support this legislation.



Sunshine Law for Health Care

How do you know if the health care you purchase actually works, or whether the charges are fair and reasonable? Some states help consumers by requiring hospitals to clearly disclose their prices and safety records (see www.wipricepoint.org, for example). We're proposing a similar law for Washington consumers. The Washington Academy of Family Physicians agrees a sunshine requirement for health care would be good for Washington's families.



Helping Patients and Doctors

Improving patient safety and helping doctors with soaring malpractice insurance costs remains a vital priority. Solutions have already been developed, and enacting them should be a priority in 2006. As a critical care nurse, I also know we could dramatically save lives and improve patient safety by giving providers more incentives to use effective health information technology. Support is building to enact this needed reform this year.



Protecting Homeowners
from Medical Catastrophes

Medical debt is the number one cause of bankruptcy. This isn't reckless credit card debt. It is debt caused by illness or injury beyond a family's control. I'm proposing that Washington join those states that prevent a family's home from being seized for medical debt.

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2006 Legislative Report

IMPROVING EDUCATION

Any teacher or involved parent can tell you that 2005 was a great year for education in the Legislature—with important investments in teachers, schools, class-size reduction and school construction. But we need to make education our top priority again this year!



WASL Preparation

I agree with parents, teachers and students who are concerned about the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) becoming a graduation requirement in 2008. Clearly, we must do more to help students who struggle with the WASL on their first try. I'm supporting legislation to help local schools tailor additional learning opportunities to these students.

As a believer in local control, I think these opportunities should be state-funded but designed locally. They might include expanded summer school, before- and after- school programs, tutoring, or Saturday classes. We're also considering alternative paths to success for students who meet high academic standards but don't do well on high-pressure standardized tests.

Early Learning

Nearly one-third of children are already behind when they reach kindergarten. This impacts everyone in their classrooms. I'm supporting the Washington's business community's call for an Early Learning Public-Private Partnership to help more kids before they reach Kindergarten.



Serving Veterans & Military Families

Helping veterans and military families is my main focus as the Co-Chair of the Joint Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs. I take this responsibility very seriously, because we have a duty to honor and serve those who have protected our safety and freedom. I'm proposing a package of reforms that will honor military service to our flag and country with actions as well as words.

Veterans Innovation Program — Shouldn't the veterans who use services be able to help design them? I'm calling for a \$10 million state investment in veterans' emergency relief, employment, education and transition assistance or other needs—and veterans will have the lead role in determining which investments will best help veterans and military families.

Helmets to Hard Hats — Because people returning from active duty often need help to transition quickly to good jobs in their home communities, I'm proposing that returning service personnel be given priority for admission into state apprenticeship programs that lead to good jobs.

Patriotic Employer Act — No one should lose their civilian job because they served our country. I support a \$1000 tax credit to reward small businesses hold jobs open for Washington National Guard and other service personnel returning from active duty.

National Guard Active Duty Protection — Last year, we passed financial protections for National Guard members and their families. I hope to extend financial protections to businesses owned by National Guard member. No one who serves in uniform should lose their business as a result of their service.

Energy Assistance for Needy Families

I'm happy that the first new law of 2006 will provide energy assistance to help more than 14,000 needy families and senior citizens in Washington—including 942 in Pierce County—to stay warm in their homes despite this year's extraordinary energy costs. The funding comes from a utilities settlement with Qwest, and not from general taxes. I proudly co-sponsored this assistance.



Helping Small Businesses

Small businesses are the heart of our local and state economies. I'm supporting several measures this year to help small businesses, including: (1) A Small Business Job Creation Tax Credit to reduce taxes on businesses that provide good jobs; (2) Regulatory relief to cut red tape that drives up small business costs; and (3) Premium assistance for Small Businesses to help them insure their employees.

Working for Seniors

I'm happy to report that my work for senior citizens in property tax relief and health care issues (including prescription drugs) led to my being elected Chair of the Long-term Care Financing & Chronic Care Management Task Force. We will be holding meetings around the state and working diligently for the next 18 months to recommend strategies for funding long-term and chronic care that preserves as much independence as possible and serves people with dignity. Please send me any ideas you have!



Hurricane Katrina Photo by Washington National Guard



Energy Freedom for Washington

I strongly support the bipartisan effort to help Washington farmers develop a biodiesel industry in Washington. Every gallon of fuel we produce in Washington is a gallon we don't have to import from the Middle East or oil companies in other states. Promoting renewable energy is good for our environment, too.